

Social Capital in the Spanish Quality of Working Life Survey

Felix Requena

Department of Sociology
Faculty of Political Sciences
University of Santiago
Campus Sur
15782 Santiago de Compostela
Spain
frequena@arrakis.es

Country paper prepared by Felix Requena representing Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, for the OECD- UK ONS International Conference on Social Capital Measurement, September 25-27, 2002.

1. Introduction.

In 1999, the Spanish Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs initiated the Quality of Working Life Survey¹ [Encuesta de Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo (ECVT)]. Its objective is to provide a tool for gathering substantive information concerning employed people's social relations, situations, attitudes, and values at the work place. The survey has two main focuses: on one side, to obtain information on the real circumstances around work daily activities and the relationships that working people have at work; and on the other side, to get information on perception that working people have of the work setting and of ordinary work tasks.

ECVT is an annual periodical survey. It is based on a random representative national sample based on a three-stage design, and stratified by regions and municipal size. The sample size was N=6,020 employed population of both sexes, aged 16 and over, living in a family setting. The survey was carried out face to face at the respondent's homes in order to avoid pressures from the corporate setting. The confidence limit was 95.5% (2σ), and the estimated error, for the most unfavourable case, was $\pm 1.4\%$ ². The occupational structure data that ECVT shows are concordant with Spanish Labour Force Survey.

One of the survey's main focuses is to gather information on different components of job satisfaction. Levels of job satisfaction are quite important for productivity. To be or not to be satisfied with work tasks is highly related with the production quantity and quality that a worker can achieve. In the survey, satisfaction is a multidimensional concept: it refers to a wide set of situations and aspects around the working place. Such goes from superiors, co-workers relationships, to worker's personal evaluation of working conditions, stress, and tiredness. Thus, Survey obtains information on labour relations and on the quality of working life to relate with family structure and workers' social environment.

¹ The data from the Quality of Working Life Survey (Encuesta de Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo –ECVT) are available in the Subdirección General de Estadísticas Sociales y Laborales of Spain's Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Ministerio del Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, Madrid, Spain. E-mail: estadistica@mtas.es). For a lengthier explanation of the objectives and possibilities for social research provided by this survey, see Requena (2000).

² For sample design details, see MTAS, 2001, (<http://www.mtas.es/Estadisticas/ECVT/Welcome.htm>).

The ECVT has several parts: 1) quality of working life study; 2) the real situation in the work place, studying elements such as division, organization, etc. at work; 3) employee's family structure; 4) values, attitudes, and personal evaluations of work; and 5) socio-demographic data of employed people.

There are several social capital questions in the ECVT. Many social capital dimensions can be seen in the ECVT. The survey is sensitive to how social capital aspects are related to the work setting. In 2001, the survey design team added a set of trust, relationships, engagement, communication and influence questions. These questions give a sample of social capital in the work environment.

2. Social capital in the ECVT.

The social capital concept used in the ECVT

Social capital is a multidimensional concept. In this survey, the concept is defined from a wide point of view (but always referring to employed people): from involvement in social relations, and the links derived from belonging to social networks (Burt, 2000; 2001), to participation in organised groups, engagement (Putnam, 1993; Putnam, Leorandi and Nanetti, 1993), and general trust in others (Coleman, 1988; Brehm y Rahn, 1997).

Social capital concept is an important one because it joins several important sociological concepts, such as social support, integration and cohesion. These concepts have important consequences in both political (Brehm y Rahn, 1997) and economic arenas (Knack y Keefer, 1997; Beugelsdijk, Groot y van Schaik, 2002). The organisations also work better if people belong to, and have a good amount of social capital (Lin, *et. al.*, 2001).

Social capital is essential for the well-functioning of market relations; economic institutions are based on these relationships (Fukuyama, 1995). In the same way, economic transactions such as contracts, looking for and achieving jobs, are more efficient when they are involved in social networks (Granovetter, 1985; Requena, 1991; de Graff y Flap, 1988). A good example is how social networks empower high technology market movements, as we can see either at Silicon Valley (Saxenian, 1994),

or Northern Italy industrial districts (Pyke, *et. al.*, 1990). Far from being a primal industrial anachronism social capital lubricates high technology or fashion industries. The social capital approach helps in formulating new development strategies.

The ECVT uses the social capital concept in the widest sense; in other words, it includes aspects such as to refer to norms, social integration, trust in others, company or institutional engagement, and social relationships. It refers to a set of norms and informal values that the group of members share and permits cooperation between them. These shared norms and values generate trust among the participants. In other words, it is the set of cooperative relations between social actors that facilitate solutions to collective action problems.

This definition is quite similar to the one used in OECD: Networks together with shared norms, values and understandings that facilitate co-operation within or among groups (OECD, 2001); because co-operative social networks imply shared norms and values.

Social capital questions in the ECVT

The social capital concept has multiple operative applications for social organisations analysis in general, and companies in particular. In order to achieve success in their activities, the firms are organisations that need cooperation from their members. For this reason, the ECVT is interested in studying how particular social capital aspects (such as trust, engagement, relations with others) affect the development of activities inside organisations or companies in order to generate well-being at work.

The main ECVT focus is to study the quality of working life, but its data gives information on a wide set of questions for studying working people. Thus, it is possible to analyse some OECD social capital definition elements: social relationships, trust other people, shared norms, or community participation.

The ECVT covers the majority of social capital dimensions that OECD propouses (see Table 1). It is important to remember, however, that these questions are only referred to employed people, not to the general population. Furthermore, the ECVT has considered some extra social capital dimensions, such as communication and influence. Of course, it always refers to the company context. It is considered that these two dimensions have importance as canalisation (communication) and as result or consequence (influence) of the social capital.

TABLE 1.

Measurement of the social capital dimensions in the ECVT.

As happen in the majority of surveys, the questions are design in a pragmatic and in a *ad hoc* form in order to cover the survey requirements. This happens in the ECVT. Its questions have been designed to study the satisfaction processes and the quality of working life. However, the design team have been conscious of the importance that social capital has on work satisfaction and quality of working life. It has not been particularly designed to study the social capital, but for the working people we can do it, in a satisfactorily form. For this reason, the references to social relationships, trust, participation and engagement, always refer to superiors, subordinates and co-workers, and to the company setting.

The social capital is a multidimensional concept, for this reason, in order to measure it, we need a wide variety of indicators. Thus, a good social capital index will be one that covers a great amount of aspects concerning all their dimensions. The ECVT covers the majority of those dimensions. Now, we will see some questions that measure these dimensions.

Trust. It has two aspects: trust in others, and trust in institutions (in our case companies). On one side, *trust in others* is measured with the question:

“Many times, the people that work together in a company trust each other because a set of common implicit norms is working. However, many times, the people do not trust each other, and they collaborate only when norms and regulations, negotiated with hard effort and applied hardly, exist.

Please, could you tell me if you, in particular, trust a lot, quite a lot, a little, not a lot or not at all the following people of your company/organisation?

- trust in my superiors
- trust in my co-workers
- trust in my subordinates”

This is the main trust indicator in the ECVT³. This indicator is sensitive to different company positions. However, when it is used as a whole trust indicator –not in order to study a particular kind of company position—, it shows correlation in a majority of cases, and, in fact, works as only one indicator: trust in others inside the company.

Correlations of trust in others in the company *

	Trust in my superiors	Trust in my co-workers	Trust in my subordinates
Trust in my superiors	--	.506	.531
Trust in my co-workers		--	.629
Trust in my subordinates			--

* Computed only with wage-earning working people. N=4800.
All correlations are significant at 0,01 level (bilateral).

On the other side, *trust in institutions* is measured with a question related to the trust in the company where the employed works. In particular, the question asks on the trust in the others in the company as whole. The question is:

“In general, how do you respond to the following sentence, agree a lot, agree, indifferent, disagree a little or disagree?”

-In my company, people that work together trust each other because in this way working is easier and better”.

However, this question is more a particular variation of trust in others in the company setting, than a trust in company as an institution question . Probably, trust in company as an institution will be seen better in the ECVT questions set defined generally as “engagement” (see Table 1).

Engagement is defined as feeling obligated to take care of something, and seeing it as their own, in this case the company. This engagement with the institution (company) is measured with the following set of questions:

“In general, how do you respond to the following sentence, agree a lot, agree, indifferent, disagree a little or disagree?”

³ This question is available only on 2001 follow up questionnaire.

-I am disposed to give more input to help my organisation or company success.

-The problems of my company feel like they are my own.

-I am proud of working for my company”.

As Brehm and Rahn (1997) show it is interesting to appreciate the correlation between trust in others and trust in institutions. Thus, trust in superiors, in co-workers and in subordinates, and engagement with company correlations can be seen in the next table:

Trust in others and engagement with company correlations*

	(a)	(b)	(c)	(d)	(e)	(f)
Trust in superiors (a)	--	.506	.531	.311	.413	.296
Trust in co-workers (b)		--	.629	.188	.259	.169
Trust in subordinates (c)			--	.177	.268	.231
More input to help my company success (d)				--	.456	.465
I'm proud of working for my company (e)					--	.387
The problems of my company feel like they are my own(f)						--

* Computed only with wage-earning working people. N=4800.

All correlations are significant at 0,01 level (bilateral).

In the ECVT the correlations between trust in others and engagement with the company are significant but they are not higher as Brehm and Rahn (1997: 1014) showed when they studied the relationship between trust in others and trust in government institutions (.63). However, correlation increases with trust in superiors and pride in working for a particular company (.41).

The *informal networks* can be obtained through the following questions related to receipt of help from other people outside the household, such as friends, acquaintances, or work colleagues. The questions refers to how do you obtain your job (current and first job), through friends, acquaintances, etc. Another question is: did you obtain financial help from friends when you were unemployed and not receiving benefits? Also, the survey has a question on friends relationships with people at work. However, the ECVT has no question related to provision of unpaid help to friends, acquaintances, etc.

The ECVT also pays attention to *community participation*. The survey considers that participation in associative organisations is an important element in improving people's quality of life, in general, and in the work setting, in particular. There are questions related to belonging to in several voluntary organisations as a member or as an active member. However, it is not asked if people did any unpaid work for those organisations. This issue can be covered by the differentiation between active or non-active member.

Obviously, in the ECVT there is no question on political participation. Nevertheless, there are questions related to communication inside the company, and the possibility to take part on decisions. This two elements, communication and participation, can also be understood as social capital elements, as in the ECVT.

3. Social capital as a quality of working life explicative factor.

This section focuses on labour and corporate settings, so the analysis is limited to salaried employees. The number of occupied workers of either sex employed by public or private organisations/companies in the survey was $N = 4,800$. In this fashion we limit our study to social capital's effects on the processes that generate quality of life at work within companies and organisations.

Thus, this section shows an example of social capital utility on quality of working life study (Requena, 2002). There is a significant strong association between social capital⁴ and quality of working life⁵ level (.60). A regression analysis lets us show the social

⁴ In this analysis, social capital was measured by the following variables:

Trust: I have [a lot, some, a little, not much, no] trust in management; In my company/organisation people who work together trust each other because that is the best and easiest way to get the work done. (The internal consistency of the items that compose this scale is measured by Cronbach's alpha = .75).

Social relations: Could you please tell me if you have strong friendships with [all, most, some, almost none, none] of your co-workers? (i.e. asking for a favor; going out to dinner or coffee with them and/or their colleagues); In general how would you describe the relationships between peers in your workplace? [very good, fairly good, neither good nor bad, fairly poor, very poor]. (Cronbach's alpha = .59).

Engagement: I am willing to work more than is required in order to help my company or organisation succeed; I am proud to be working for my company or organisation; I feel like the problems of my company/organisation are my own. (Cronbach's alpha = .69).

Communication: I can give my opinion concerning matters related to my job.

Influence: At work I can put my ideas into practice.

⁵ The index of quality of working life used by ECVT is a complex measure referring exclusively to the worker's job position. This indicator is constructed to include both subjective and objective elements affecting quality of life at work, and even though some aspects go beyond labour, they are related to the job setting as they influence the performance and well-being of workers. In this index each of the following labour situations is scored with one point:

capital is a good explicative factor of quality of working life. Trust, work place social relationships, company/organisation engagement, communication, and the influence possibilities in daily work are elements which explain a great proportion of the quality of working life total amount that people can obtain in the job place. Thus, personal well-being at work place increases when the employed work with high trust, social relationships, communication, engagement and influence work levels.

In table 2 we can see the regression models on quality of working life. The more complete model [equation (5)] shows that the strength of the relationship between the set of factors and the quality of life at work is .598. The coefficient of determination explains 35.8% of the total variance in quality of working life.

TABLE 2

The models were constructed step by step. At each new step a set of variables were added to the model. The set of variables added to the new model were the following: personal, familiar, company/organisation, and work place attributes, and finally social capital dimensions. When they were computed one by one, all these attribute variable sets were significant in explaining the quality of working life. However, when social capital dimensions were added as predictor to the regression model, the explained variance increased the double (2.01 times). Even though, the working people, work place and company attributes are so important in explaining the quality of working life, we must say, however, that when social capital is added to the model it strengthens the explanation of quality of working life.

In this model on quality of working life the strength of the attribute predictors were different. Age, years of education, and income always have a positive effect notwithstanding the variables by which the model are controlled. Belonging to private sector, working a shift schedule, or working in a great company are factors that generate worse quality of working life levels. The same applies to more weekly working hours,

Objective: independence in job position; not working on weekends; eating at home on work days; no overcrowding at home.

Subjective: demonstrating a high degree of satisfaction with the work done (responses 8,9, and 10 of a numerical rating scale from 1 to 10, where 10 is the highest work satisfaction); work environment is considered stimulating; work is not exhausting. The scale varies from extremely low quality of work life at 0 to extremely high quality of work life at 7. In order to facilitate its use and comprehension, the indicator has been transformed into a normal scale ranging from 0 to 10.

and dangerous work conditions. In family settings, to have familiar responsibilities, such as to be head of household, or to have dependent children imply worse quality of working life levels as well. However, all social capital dimensions are positive predictors of quality of working life.

4. Conclusions.

As we have seen, social capital dimensions are a good predictors of quality of working life. They act as a lubricant for good functioning in the social institutions, in general; and in the economic institutions, in particular. Even though the ECVT is not a survey particularly designed to measure social capital, its design team were conscious that social capital is one of the elements that enrich human being; for this reason, they have introduced several social capital indicators that can be related to job satisfaction levels, working people, and company characteristics.

In the international scope several surveys with social capital questions exist (WVS⁶, EVS⁷, ISSP⁸, etc.), however, it could be good to propose that some supranational organisation, such as OECD, UN, Eurostat, etc., coordinate social capital dimensions normalisation in order to design a harmonised questionnaire to permit international comparability. These comparability will improve the correct dimension measurement between social capital and development across different countries.

The world bank, conscious of social capital importance on the development process and on social inclusion, would promote these initiatives for social capital measurement harmonisation in order to have a correct tool for integration programs and development in less developed areas.

⁶ World Values Surveys.

⁷ European Values Surveys.

⁸ International Social Survey Program.

References:

- Beugelskijk, S.; Groot, H.L.F.; and Schaik, A.B.T.M.v. 2002, 'Trust and economic Growth', Tinbergen University: Tinbergen Institute Discussion Paper, TI 2002-049/3.
- Brehn, J. and W. Rahn: 1997, 'Individual-Level evidence for the causes and consequences of social capital', *American Journal of Political Science* 41, pp. 999-1023.
- Burt, R.: 2000, 'The network structure of social capital', Sutton, R.I. and B.M. Staw, (ed.) *Research in organizational behavior*, Greenwich, CT.: JAY press, vol. 22.
- Burt, R.: 2001, 'Structural holes versus network closure as social capital', Lin, N., K. Cook and R. Burt (Eds.) *Social Capital, Theory and Research*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter, pp 31-56.
- Coleman, J.S.: 1988, 'Social capital in the creation of human capital', *American Journal of Sociology* 94, pp. s95-s12.
- De Graaf, N.D. and H.D. Flap: 1988, 'With a little help from my friends': Social resources as an explanation of occupational status and income in West Germany, The Netherlands, and the United States', *Social Forces* 67(2), pp. 452-472.
- Fukuyama, F.: 1995, *Trust: The Social Virtues And The Creation of Prosperity*, New York: Free Press.
- Granovetter, M.S.: 1985, 'Economic action and social structure: The problem of embeddedness', *American Journal of Sociology* 91, pp. 481-510
- Knack, S.; and Keefer, P. 1997, 'Does social capital have an economic pay-off? A cross country investigation'. *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 112-4, pp. 1251-1288.
- Lin, N., K. Cook and R. Burt (Eds.): 2001, 'Preface', *Social Capital, Theory and Research*, New York: Aldine de Gruyter.
- Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales, 2001. *Encuesta de Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo 2001*. Madrid: MTAS.
- OECD, 2001. *The Well-Being of Nations. The role of human and social capital*, OECD: Center for Educational Research and Innovation.
- Putnam, R. Leonardi, R.; and Nanetti, R.Y. 1993, *Making Democracy work*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R.: 1993, 'The prosperous community: Social capital and public life', *The American Prospect* 4 (13), pp. 35-42.
- Pyke, F., G. Becattini and W. Sengenberger: 1990, *Industrial districts and inter-firm co-operation in Italy* (ILO –International Labour Office–, Geneva).
- Requena, F.: 1991, 'Social resources and occupational status attainment in Spain: A cross-national comparison with the United States and the Netherlands', *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 23, pp. 233-242.
- Requena, F.: 2000, 'Encuesta de Calidad de Vida en el Trabajo: Posibilidades para el seguimiento de la situación laboral', *Revista del Ministerio de Trabajo, Serie Economía y Sociología* 21, pp. 235-245.

- Requena, F.: (2002), 'Social capital, satisfaction and quality of life in the workplace' Social Indicators Research (accepted, forthcoming).
- Saxenian, A.L.: 1994, Regional Advantage: culture and competition in Silicon Valley and Route 128, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Table 1
SOCIAL CAPITAL MATRIX
Comparing ECVT and OECD definitions

Theme	Aspect	Measurement	Variable in the questionnaire	ECVT Def.	OECD Def.	
Trust	Trust in others in general	Trust in superiors	V305	•1	•	
		Trust in co-workers	V306	•1	•	
		Trust in subordinates	V307	•1	•	
		Trust in place of work	V316	•1	•	
Engagement	Engagement with the firm / company	Give more input to help my company succeed	V196	•	•	
		The problems of my company feel like they are my own	V201	•	•	
		I'm proud of working for my company	V197	•	•	
		In my company collaboration exists because there is a hierarchy which ensures that tasks are completed (inverse)	V313	•1	•	
		At work, the most important thing is to comply with the obligations of the contract, going beyond this leads to not being appreciated for your efforts (inverse)	V314	•1	•	
		Provision of unpaid help to friends outside the household				•
		Receipt of unpaid help from persons outside the household				
Informal networks	Provision of unpaid help to friends outside the household	Obtained his/her current job through friends, acquaintances or relatives	V30	•	•	
		Obtained his/her first job through friends, acquaintances or relatives	V52	•	•	
		Has financial help from friends when unemployed and not receiving benefits	V63	•	•	
	Other active social involvement with friends, relatives, acquaintances and work colleagues		Good friendships with people at work	V308	•1	•
			Good relationships with my superiors	V142	•	•
			Good relationships with my co-workers	V143	•	•

Table 1 (Continued)
SOCIAL CAPITAL MATRIX
Comparing ECVT and OECD definitions

Theme	Aspect	Measurement	Variable in the questionnaire	ECVT Def.	OECD Def.	
Participation	Participation in organised groups (e.g. religious, political, cultural or community, etc)	Voluntary organisations active/ no active member:		•	•	
		-Professionals	V206			
		-Ecologist, environment	V207			
		-Sport, recreational	V208			
		-Cultural, art	V209			
		-Religious	V210			
		-Political Parties	V211			
		-Charities	V212			
		-Neighbours organisations	V213			
		-Trade Unions	V216 a v219			
Other factors	Voluntary work in these groups	See above			•	
		Bonding (within groups) and bridging (across groups)			•	
	Well-being	Size of the house		V176	•	•
		Num of rooms		V177	•	•
		Work satisfaction		V92	•	•
		Life satisfaction		V204	•	•
		General level of happiness		V205	•	•
	Political participation					•
	Communication	Communication in the company	You can give your opinions in the company	V131	•	
		Participation in the company	Know the objectives of your company	V134	•	
Influence	Participation in the company	Participation in decisions concerning your own tasks	V116	•		
		My boss values my suggestions	V132	•		
		I can put my ideas into practice	V111	•		

Notes: 1. Available only on 2001 follow up questionnaire. The rest questions was asked in all waves: 1999, 2000, 2001.

Table 2
Effects on Quality of Life at Work

Independent Variables	Eq.(1)	Eq.(2)	Eq.(3)	Eq.(4)	Eq.(5)
Multiple correlation	.238	.312	.411	.421	.598
Constant	-.596 (-.72)	-.480 (-.53)	-2.192 (-2.26)*	-2.985 (-3.03)*	-1.209 (-1.27)
<u>Personal Variables</u>					
Age	.018 (6.26)***	.012 (4.01)***	.002 (.54)	.008 (2.22)	.01 (2.62)**
Male	-.264 (-3.87)***	-.173 (-2.38)*	.01 (.13)	.07 (.91)	-.46 (-6.0)
Num. of years of education	.076 (8.83)***	.052 (5.49)***	.015 (1.57)	.011 (1.18)	.011 (1.21)
Income	.365 (4.75)***	.389 (4.67)***	.785 (8.55)***	.853 (9.21)***	.325 (3.65)***
Size of city	-.045 (-3.16)**	-.046 (-3.03)**	-.05 (-3.42)**	-.05 (-3.41)**	-.46 (-3.26)**
<u>Corporate Variables</u>					
Size of company		-.064 (-4.42)***	-.067 (-4.69)***	-.067 (-4.73)***	-.018 (-1.34)
Industry		1.164 (6.45)***	.965 (5.43)***	.927 (5.24)***	.829 (4.95)***
Construction		.515 (2.75)**	.580 (3.14)**	.559 (3.03)**	.568 (3.27)**
Services		.956 (5.48)***	.719 (4.19)***	.675 (3.95)***	.422 (2.60)**
Private sector		-.501 (-5.44)***	-.421 (-4.58)***	-.422 (-4.61)***	-.458 (-5.46)***
Working a shift schedule		-.778 (-9.43)***	-.626 (-7.69)***	-.621 (-7.66)***	-.433 (-5.75)***
<u>Workplace variables</u>					
Weekly work hours			-.05 (-13.73)***	-.047 (-14.04)***	-.042 (-12.44)***
Level in hierarchy			.06 (.69)	.067 (.778)	.005 (.06)
Supervisor			.140 (1.46)	.158 (1.66)*	-.111 (-1.26)
Years working at company			.006 (1.49)	.007 (1.72)*	.004 (.93)
Dangerous work conditions			-.257 (-9.44)***	-.249 (-9.17)***	-.187 (-7.38)***

Table 2 (continued)
Effects on Quality of Life at Work

Independent Variables	Eq.(1)	Eq.(2)	Eq.(3)	Eq.(4)	Eq.(5)
<u>Family Setting Variables</u>					
Head of household				-.175 (-2.10)*	-.007 (-.09)
Married				.095 (.96)	.021 (.22)
Separated or divorced				.198 (1.18)	.135 (.86)
Widower				.439 (1.46)	.239 (.80)
Dependent children				-.412 (-4.66)***	-.375 (-4.50)***
<u>Social Capital Variables</u>					
Trust					.261 (5.86)***
Relationships					.191 (4.79)***
Commitment					.317 (8.85)***
Communication					.018 (.63)
Influence					.419 (16.66)***
R-squared	.056	.097	.169	.178	.358
F of the model	5.437***	37.843***	47.616***	38.432***	69.707***
<u>Comparison with Prior Model</u>					
Increase in R-squared		.041	.072	.009	.18
Times increased		1.73	1.74	1.05	2.01

Source: Requena, F. (2002).

Note: Student's *t* appears in parenthesis under the respective estimated parameter.

Level of Significance:

*** $p < .001$

** $p < .01$

* $p < .1$